

7-1-1958

## The Palimpsest, vol.39 no.7, July 1958

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### Recommended Citation

"The Palimpsest, vol.39 no.7, July 1958." *The Palimpsest* 39 (1958).

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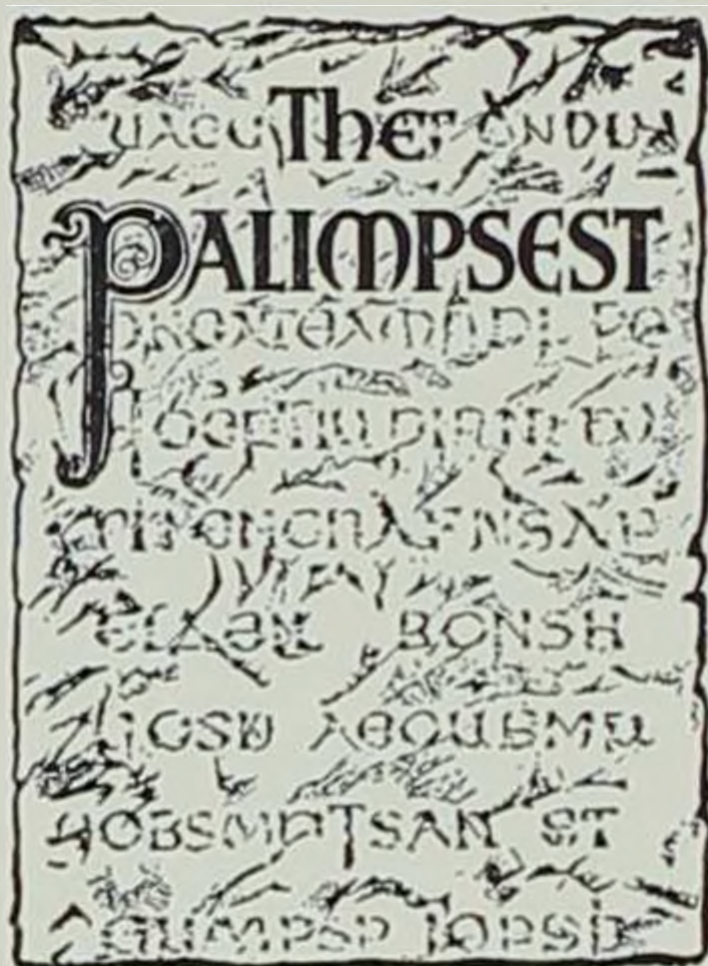
# *The* **PALIMPSEST**



Keokuk Mounted on His Horse  
KEOKUK — THE WATCHFUL FOX

Published Monthly by  
**The State Historical Society of Iowa**  
Iowa City, Iowa  
JULY, 1958





## *The Meaning of Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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This is a reprint of the April, 1928, issue of THE PALIMPSEST, which has long been out of print. The illustrations have been added by the present editor.

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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT  
IOWA CITY IOWA UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

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PRICE — 25 cents per copy; \$2.50 per year; free to Members

MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual Dues \$3.00

ADDRESS — The State Historical Society, Iowa City, Iowa



# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XXXIX

ISSUED IN JULY 1958

No. 7

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## The Watchful Fox

Written grandly in the annals of early Iowa is the name of Keokuk. As a chief of the Sacs he stands out preëminently among all the leaders of that powerful tribe, rivalled only by Black Hawk. Intelligent, crafty, cautious, and vain, Keokuk was always alert in his own interests. In contrast, Black Hawk was outright, scorning affectation and deceit, patriotic, and bold — qualities of character not to be found in the Watchful Fox. Black Hawk was the man of war, looking longingly at the hills and valleys of his youth, fighting for his people and their heritage, and losing his fight all the way. Keokuk was the man of guile, the talker, achieving his ends and high rank by dint of words and scheming. A man with a persuasive tongue was Keokuk, an orator unsurpassed in a tribe that was famous for the eloquence of its chiefs, adroit, convincing, always projecting new and devious ways of accomplishing results to his own advantage. He looked into the face of the wind and cut and reefed his sails accordingly.



Keokuk was born at Saukenuk, near Rock Island, about 1780. His mother is said to have been a half-breed, the daughter of a French trader. Not a chief by birth, since he belonged to a non-ruling gens, Keokuk rose to that position through his ability in politics and his happy faculty of always putting the best foot forward on public occasions. His name, Kiyokag in the Sac language, meaning "one who moves about alert," is descriptive of his early youth. He watched for opportunities and seized every advantage.

While still young he was permitted to attend the tribal councils. Later he was made tribal guest-keeper. This was his first step forward. Supplied with every means of rendering hospitality for the tribe, and at tribal expense, Keokuk played the genial host to perfection. His lodge soon became the center of the social and political life of the tribe. With this advantage he built his political fences rapidly and well.

The social organization and traditions of the tribe provided many barriers to the ambitious Keokuk, but he did not permit this to deter him. He set himself against the rigid customs and ironclad taboos of his tribe, not openly and aggressively, but quietly, unpretentiously, diplomatically. A veiled attack being his method, he stood always in the background playing one faction against another. As time passed he became the leading councillor in the Sac assembly.



At an early date he perceived that it was futile to oppose the power and strength of the white men, so he veered his own course accordingly. Always he curried the white man's favor. When the settlers began to crowd the Indians out of their beloved village of Saukenuk, Keokuk accepted the advice of the traders and willingly moved across the Mississippi to the Iowa country, as Poweshiek and the Foxes had done long before. Peace at any price he counted better than war with the whites. With some of the warriors he lost prestige, but most of the tribe followed him to the new village on the Iowa River. The more belligerent faction turned to Black Hawk for leadership. Thus the Sacs who had dwelt together in harmony longer than they could remember were hopelessly divided.

The decisive contest for leadership of the united tribe occurred in the war council at Keokuk's village in April, 1832. Black Hawk with his band of three hundred braves came with plans for a great Indian confederacy capable of driving the settlers out of the Mississippi Valley. The venerable chief urged his fellow tribesmen to take up their tomahawks and go on the warpath to avenge the wrongs of their people. Under the influence of the war dance and the spell of his patriotism, the warriors rallied to the cause, and it seemed for the moment that the will of Black Hawk would prevail. Then Keokuk spoke. In a few words he won the attention of the war-bent braves, and then



swiftly, adroitly, and with matchless skill he painted such a terrible picture of tribal sacrifices that the warriors who had been most clamorous for war sat silent and abashed. The glory of battle and revenge had suddenly faded. Keokuk was master of the situation, Black Hawk the discredited rival. The old chief's courage and tribal loyalty were no match for the younger man's diplomacy and eloquence.

Too proud to face the humiliation of accepting the dominance of Keokuk and too courageous to be deterred by fatal consequences, Black Hawk led his little band of warriors on the warpath. Meanwhile, Keokuk hastened to Fort Armstrong to assure the authorities of his own friendship. Deftly he played the part of a faithful ally. While Black Hawk fought for the ancient home of his people, Keokuk followed the wiser but less noble policy of peaceful submission to the purpose of a stronger race. And when the war was over, when Black Hawk's band had been almost wiped out and Black Hawk himself was a prisoner, Keokuk was in a position to assume the unchallenged leadership of his tribe. His formal recognition as high chief of the Sacs and Foxes was made the final act of the long drama of his struggle for supremacy, and to the very end Keokuk played the rôle of the shrewd and subtle schemer that he was.

The Sacs and Foxes had assembled at Fort Armstrong. Keokuk was there, confident and dig-



nified as became a big chief. Black Hawk was there, a prisoner of war, defeated and humbled before his own people, yet willing to accept his fate. After the assembled chiefs and warriors had listened attentively to the greetings of Major John Garland and President Jackson's speech to Black Hawk in Baltimore had been read, Keokuk answered in a happy vein, speaking of new days, new friends, and a new nation moving forward in peace and contentment.

Major Garland then arose again and announced that the Great Father in Washington would from that time on acknowledge Keokuk as the principal chief of the Sacs and Foxes and that he wished Black Hawk to consent to that plan. Black Hawk, upon hearing the interpreted version of these remarks, got the impression that the President had said he must conform to the counsels of Keokuk. That was too much for the proud spirit of Black Hawk to bear. Springing to his feet, agitated, trembling with rage, he spoke in his old imperious manner.

I am a man — an old man. I will not conform to the counsels of any one. I will act for myself; no one shall govern me. I am old; my hair is gray. I once gave counsel to my young men. Am I to conform to others? I shall soon go to the Great Spirit where I shall be at rest. What I said to our great father at Washington, I say again. I will always listen to him. I am done.

A great furore was caused by these words



wrung from the heart of the old chief. He had made peace with the government, but he had not supposed that he would be made a ward of Keokuk. In vain the interpreter tried to explain. At last Keokuk arose and turning to the deposed chief, he spoke as though admonishing a child.

Why do you speak so before the white men? I will speak for you. You trembled; you did not mean what you said.

Then, addressing the council, he continued.

Our brother who has again come to us has spoken, but he spoke in wrath; his tongue was forked; he spoke not like a man or a Sac. He knew his words were bad. He trembled like the oak whose roots have been wasted by many rains. He is old; what he said let us forget. I have spoken for him. What I have said are his own words — not mine. Let us say he spoke in council to-day — that his words were good. I have spoken.

What a consummate politician! In the realm of achieving his own ambitions Keokuk had no equal among the Indians. And the principal factor of his success was his eloquence. He had a marvelous faculty of saying precisely the right thing at the right time. He spoke rapidly, dramatically, and with great intensity. Word pictures, richly colored and highly imaginative, flowed easily from his lips. His eyes glowed, his whole being became animated as he threw himself into his discourse. Possessing a rich, powerful voice, his enunciation was particularly good so that not a syllable was lost to the listener. On his trip east in 1837 he



spoke before thousands and in every case his dignity of bearing and mastery of the situation made a striking and profound impression on his audiences. He was compared favorably with Webster, Calhoun, and other orators of the day.

But Keokuk was not merely a politician and an orator. He was more than that; he was a warrior. Though reason and expediency made him friendly toward the whites, his early life was full of heroic exploits against the Sioux. Keokuk was a strong, active man, of medium height and well-knit. As a youth he excelled in the various feats of strength, speed, and endurance practiced by his people. In horsemanship and dancing he was particularly proficient. Indeed, Keokuk might be dubbed "the man on horseback." He loved fine horses and always owned the best mount and richest accoutrement obtainable on the border. George Catlin, who painted Keokuk on horseback, attests to that. "The horse that he rode was the best animal on the frontier; a fine blooded horse for which he gave the price of 300 dollars, a thing that he was quite able to, who had the distribution of 50,000 dollar annuities, annually, amongst his people. His horse was beautifully caparisoned." And he could ride his horse. Incident after incident might be related of the superb horsemanship of Keokuk.

In his first battle, when he was scarcely more than a boy, he killed a Sioux warrior with a spear. The exploit was given conspicuous notice by his



fellows because both he and his victim were on horseback at the time and since the Sioux were preëminently the horsemen of the plains, the Sacs looked upon the deed as an extraordinary achievement. A feast was prepared in honor of the event. Keokuk was elevated to the rank of a brave at once and granted all the rights of manhood, though still a youth. As an appropriate distinction he was permitted to appear on horseback on all public occasions thereafter. This unique honor Keokuk enjoyed until his death. Even though the rest of the tribe were afoot in processions or ceremonies, Keokuk might ride, and Keokuk did ride, alone and proudly among his people.

Despite his policy of peace, Keokuk had hot blood in his veins, and could give a good account of himself on the warpath if necessary, though that was not his favorite method. The way to get things done in his opinion was by using ingenuity, not war-clubs. But if necessity demanded, the war-club was not to be ignored. Many incidents in his earlier career attest the truth of this statement. Always, though, it was against the red man, not the white, that his weapons were used.

Much mention is made of an incident that occurred when Keokuk and a small band were on a hunting trip near the borders of the Sioux country. A large band of Sioux, mounted and prepared for war, came suddenly upon them. The Sacs, surprised and outnumbered, were prepared to lose



their scalps, but Keokuk, undaunted, took command of the situation. Instructing his braves to form a circle, dismount, and shoot from behind the shelter of their horses, he saved the day. Again and again the Sioux charged the entrenched Sacs, but to no avail. Finally, giving it up as a bad job, they withdrew from the scene, defeated. This battle increased Keokuk's reputation for valor as a warrior and ability as a leader.

On another occasion, while with a party of braves on the northern prairies hunting buffalo, he came upon a party of Sioux, painted and prepared for war. His village being unprotected during the time of the hunt, Keokuk surmised that it was the object of their expedition. Outnumbered and unprepared for battle, Keokuk realized that only strategy could save his people. While the enemy was engaged in a war dance and all was hubbub in their camp, Keokuk, astride his fastest pony, rode furiously into their very midst. Demanding to see their chief he said: "I have come to let you know that there are traitors in your camp. They have told me that you are preparing to attack my village. I know that they told me lies, for you could not, after smoking the pipe of peace, be so base as to murder my women and children in my absence. None but the cowards would be guilty of such conduct."

The Sioux, caught by surprise, looked upon him with open-mouthed amazement and then crowded



around him, threateningly. In a loud voice and with bold gesture, Keokuk continued: "I suppose they told me lies, but if what I have heard is true, then the Sacs are ready for you." Turning quickly, just as the Sioux were about to throw themselves on him, Keokuk dashed to safety. Back in his own village he and his party awaited the attack which did not come.

Even as a warrior, bold and valiant though he was, he resorted to diplomacy whenever it served his purpose. He saw no advantage in risking his life in combat if his wits could save him. Yet he was no coward, as his action demonstrates. He was simply the wily, calculating strategist, a dangerous foe in the field as well as a formidable antagonist at the council fire or in the forum.

At the end of the Black Hawk War the object for which Keokuk had been aiming for so many years was at last achieved. He was formally recognized by the government as the supreme chief of the confederated tribes of Sacs and Foxes. This arrangement was not received with much favor by the Indians, particularly the Foxes, who had been gradually drawing away from the Sacs. Keokuk's regime served to widen the breach rather than to close it. Nevertheless he was able, by his own power and the support of the government, to maintain his eminent position.

By the terms of the treaty of 1832 the Sacs and Foxes surrendered the Black Hawk Purchase but



retained a tract of four hundred square miles on the Iowa River which included Keokuk's village. Four years later Keokuk's Reserve was ceded to the United States, and the Indians moved to a new location on the Des Moines River where Keokuk built his lodge near the old trading post at Iowa-ville. In later years he had his principal village near the mouth of Sugar Creek, not far from the present city of Ottumwa.

Meanwhile all was not well among the Sacs. The old embers of bitterness that had existed within the tribe burst into flame. Led by Hard Fish, the adherents of Black Hawk's old British band openly attacked Keokuk's administration of affairs. He was charged with entering into a conspiracy with the traders to defraud the Indians and particularly the followers of Hard Fish. Moreover, the disbursement of the annuities by Keokuk was alleged to be partial, if not corrupt, but he always managed to suppress the opposition.

Many times his life was threatened because of his dishonesty, and on one occasion it was more than threatened. While some of the Indians were returning from a visit to the half-breeds near the mouth of the Des Moines River the ill-feeling between the Keokuk faction and the Hard Fish faction, which always manifested itself when whisky was flowing, turned into action with the result that Nahseuskuk, one of Black Hawk's sons, wounded Keokuk in the chest. The injury was so



severe that the chief had to be taken home in a canoe and it was some time before he recovered.

In 1845 Keokuk led his people out of their old Iowa haunts and into the State of Kansas. By that time profligacy and dissipation had laid strong hands upon the old chief. His declining years were filled with disgrace. Found to be untrustworthy, he was no longer in good repute with anyone. His inordinate love of money necessary to satisfy his thirst for vainglorious display had found him out. In everything he went to excess — in ostentation, in the exercise of authority, in revelry. He became a confirmed inebriate. His dominant will and insatiable ambition, being turned to the gratification of selfish desires, invoked his ruin no less than the same qualities directed toward proper ends had made him a great leader.

Within three years after leaving Iowa, early in 1848, Keokuk was dead. Some said that he died from a severe attack of delirium tremens, but others reported that he had been poisoned by a member of his tribe whom he had defrauded. Whichever version was correct, the passing of Keokuk was sordid. As the warp and woof of his life was of many hues, the tapestry of his career contained brilliant achievements in which the nobler strands of his nature were uppermost, but in the end the whole fabric was one drab expanse, unrelieved by any vestige of former grandeur.

F. R. AUMANN



## The Council on the Iowa

Saukenuk was the principal village of the Sac Indians. Strategically situated at the mouth of the Rock River in the Illinois country, this large Indian community remained for many years the seat of one of the most powerful tribes in the Upper Mississippi Valley. There the squaws cultivated extensive cornfields on the fertile river bottoms, while the braves found game abundant along the streams and particularly upon Rock Island. Moreover, a cave at the lower end of Rock Island was supposed to be inhabited by a good spirit that watched over the welfare of the Indians.

But an evil day came in 1804 when the good spirit was impotent against the white man's whisky. Some of the tribal chiefs surrendered all of their lands east of the Mississippi and promised to move west whenever the country was surveyed and sold to settlers. By 1827 settlers began to arrive in the vicinity of Rock Island, and in the spring of 1829 a few white men actually took possession of part of the cultivated fields at Saukenuk. This was contrary to the terms of the treaty, for the land had not yet been surveyed, and George Davenport, the Rock Island trader, successfully interceded for the Indians, though he advised them to



move across the river. Keokuk, the man of peace, established a new village for his band on the south bank of the Iowa River a few miles above its mouth, but Black Hawk, the leader of the hostile band, insisted upon remaining at Saukenuk in defiance of orders from the military authorities at Fort Armstrong. In June, 1831, however, he learned that a large force of undisciplined militia was advancing upon his village and, realizing the fatal consequences of a conflict with them, he hastily decamped and sought refuge in the Iowa country.

It was a severe blow to the old chief. Expelled from his lifelong home, his tribe divided, Black Hawk brooded over the decline of his power and the waning fortunes of his people. But his young warriors still had faith in their bold leader. They counselled war, and the squaws clamored for their cornfields in Illinois. Nahpope and Winneshiek also gave him bad advice, promising aid from the Winnebago and ultimate support by the British in Canada. In the spring of 1832 Black Hawk decided to go on the warpath.

Having laid a plot to capture Fort Armstrong at one bold stroke, he planned to invade Illinois and drive out the settlers. To succeed he would need many warriors, so in April he went with his whole band — braves, women, and children — to Keokuk's village where he hoped to rouse the ancient fighting spirit of his tribesmen and gain



many recruits. Well he realized that it was a final contest for tribal leadership. If he could win the support of Keokuk's band he would be the acknowledged leader of the Sacs, but if he should fail Keokuk's supremacy would be all the more secure and his own cause would be only a forlorn hope. The wily Keokuk was no less aware of the decisive consequences of the occasion.

Into the village of his rival rode the proud old warrior Black Hawk at the head of his band. They came armed and painted for war, singing their most stirring war songs and beating their drums. A British flag was borne aloft. Black Hawk was clad in the uniform of a British soldier and carried a heavy cavalry sword. When the whole band had assembled, some braves proceeded to erect a war post in a level space not far from a lodge where a white spy lay concealed among some hides and other camp equipage. From his vantage point Josiah Smart, the spy, an Indian interpreter and friend of Keokuk, saw and heard all that happened.

According to his account as related by Perry A. Armstrong in *The Sauks and the Black Hawk War*, Black Hawk withdrew a few paces, uttered a terrific war-whoop, and hurled his tomahawk into the soft bass-wood war post, thus figuratively cleaving the skull of an enemy. In that manner he declared his enlistment for battle. Nahpope, the second in command, cast his tomahawk close be-



side that of his chief, and the other braves followed in quick succession. When the war post was filled with tomahawks, the braves joined hands in a large circle and began their war dance, moving from left to right and keeping time with the drums. Faster and faster sounded the drums, faster and faster danced the Indians until the line was broken. Then each warrior, uttering a wild yell, rushed to the post and struck it with the poll of his tomahawk, thereby pledging himself to go on the warpath with his chief. After thus enlisting, the braves continued the war dance, leaping into the air, bending low, or skulking behind imaginary trees, each exhibiting some intended feat of war according to his own impulse.

At last, when the warriors were beginning to show signs of exhaustion, the venerable Black Hawk stepped into the circle and approached the war post with majestic stride. Sixty-five winters had frosted his hair, but his carriage was erect and his eyes still blazed. Proudly he faced his tribesmen. A mighty cheer burst from the lips of the savage throng. Even Keokuk's braves joined in the shout. Never had Black Hawk received a lustier ovation, never was popular acclaim more welcome. Already the spirit of war was rampant. A sign from the old chief and the howling mob became silent, eager to hear every word. Then Black Hawk spoke.

Headmen, Chiefs, Braves, and Warriors of the Sacs:





(From a lithographic copy of a painting by C. B. King)  
Blackhawk





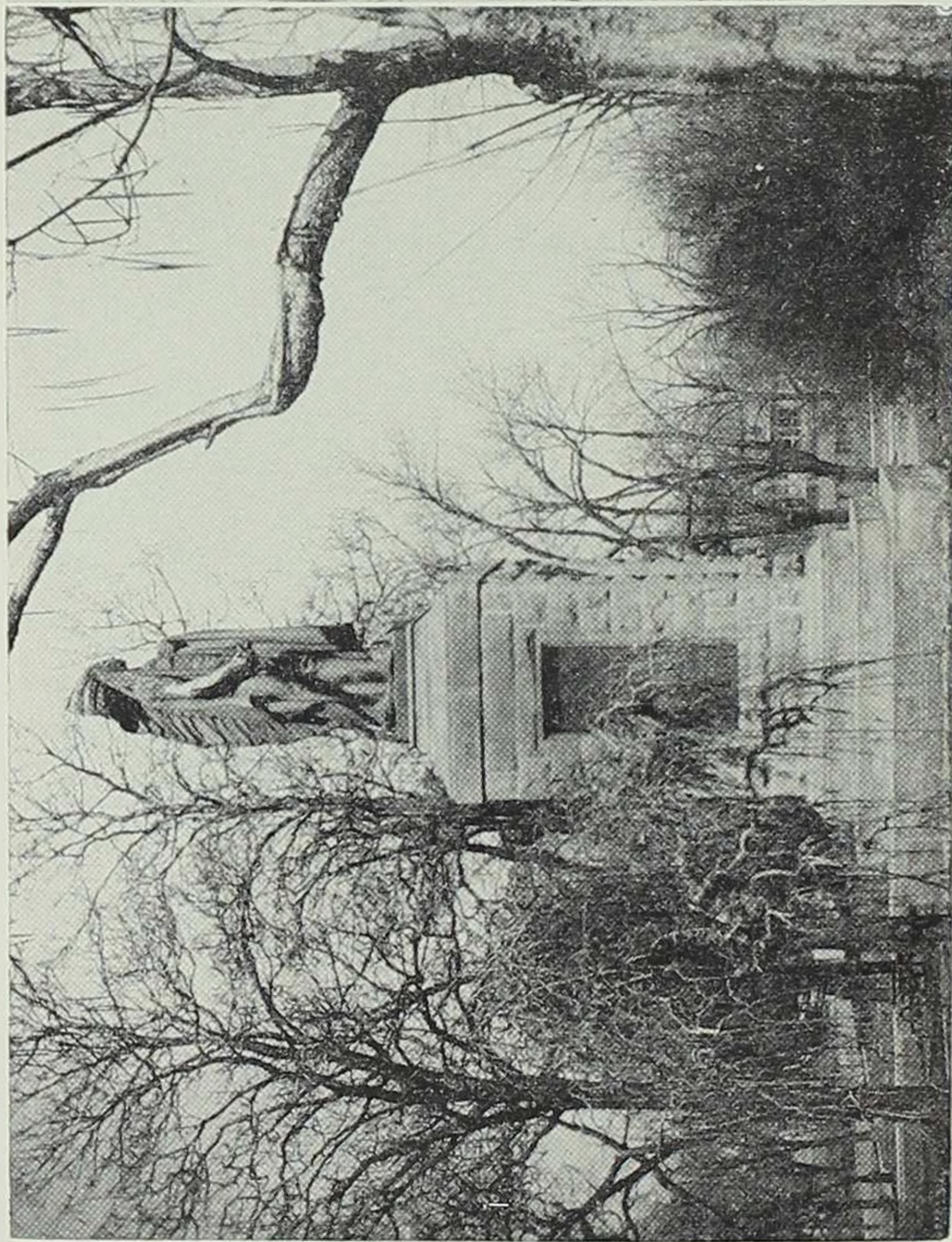
(From a daguerreotype taken in St. Louis in 1847)  
Keokuk



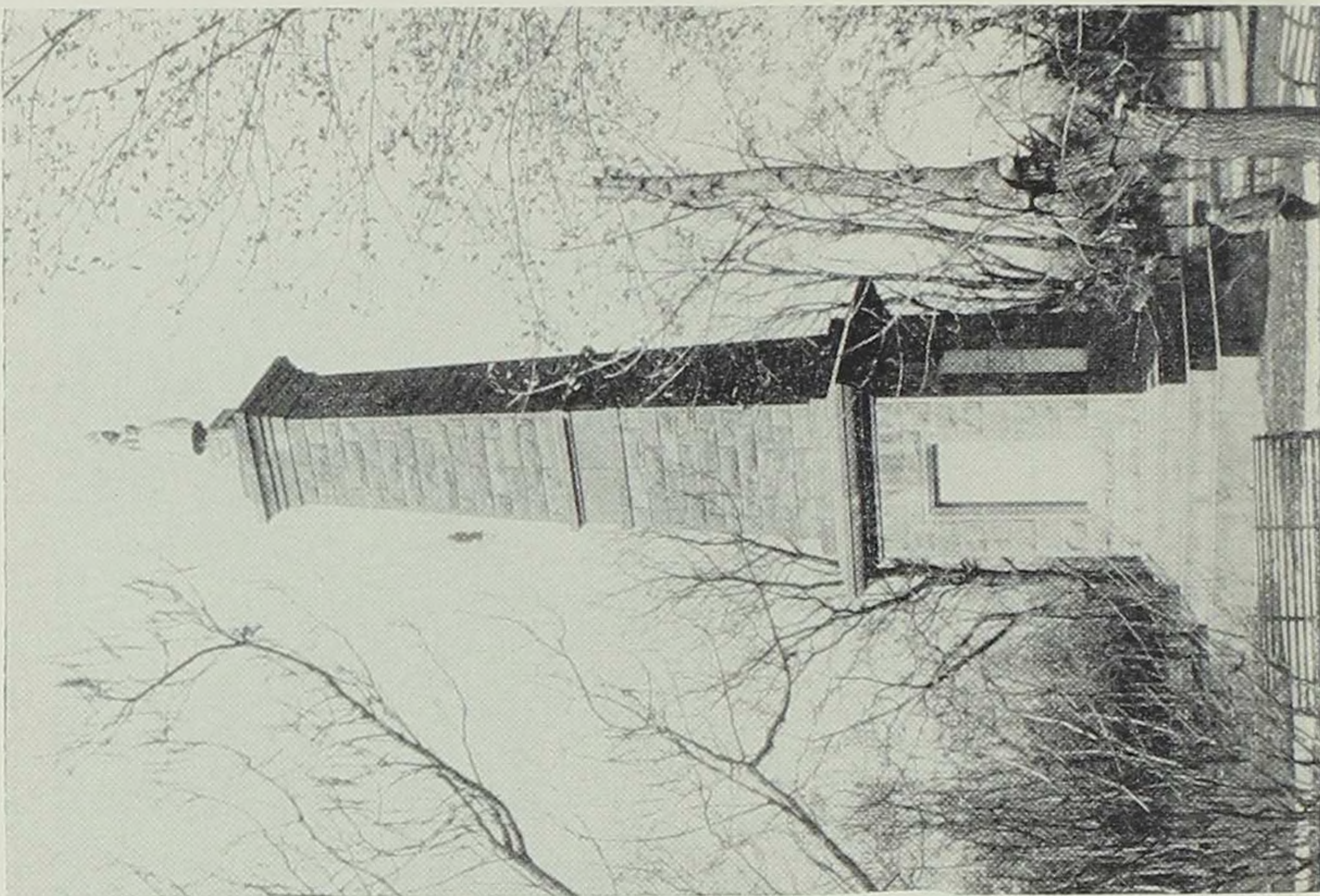


(George Catlin painting in his *North American Indians*)  
Keokuk





(Left) Statue of Chief Keokuk Overlooking Mississippi in Rand Park in Keokuk.



(Right) On Halloween in 1912 some Keokuk pranksters placed the "Bob White" cigar store Indian on top of the stone monument honoring Keokuk. The incident led to the purchase and erection of the present handsome statue.



For more than a hundred winters our nation was a powerful, happy, and united people. The Great Spirit gave to us a territory, seven hundred miles in length, along the Mississippi, reaching from Prairie du Chien to the mouth of the Illinois River. This vast territory was composed of the finest and best land for the home and use of the Indian ever found in this country. The woods and prairies teemed with buffalo, moose, elk, bear and deer, with other game suitable to our enjoyment, while its lakes, rivers, creeks, and ponds were alive with the very best kinds of fish for our food. The islands in the Mississippi were our gardens, where the Great Spirit caused berries, plums and other fruits to grow in great abundance, while the soil, when cultivated, produced corn, beans, pumpkins and squash of the finest quality and largest quantities. Our children were never known to cry of hunger, and no stranger, red or white, was permitted to enter our lodges without finding food and rest. Our nation was respected by all who came in contact with it, for we had the ability as well as the courage to defend and maintain our rights of territory, person and property against the world. Then, indeed, was it an honor to be called a Sac, for that name was a passport to our people travelling in other territories and among other nations. But an evil day befell us when we became a divided nation, and with that division our glory deserted us, leaving us with the hearts and heels of the rabbit in place of the courage and strength of the bear. All this was brought about by the Long Guns, who now claim all our territory east of the Mississippi, including Saukenuk, our ancient village, where all of us were born, raised, lived, hunted, fished and loved, and near which are our corn lands, which have yielded abundant harvest for a hundred winters, and where sleep the bones of our sacred dead, and around which cluster our fondest recollections of heroism and noble deeds of charity done by



our fathers, who were Sacs, not only in name, but in courage and action. I thank the Great Spirit for making me a Sac, and the son of a great Sac chief, and a lineal descendant of Nanamakee, the founder of our nation.

The Great Spirit is the friend and protector of the Sacs, and has accompanied me as your war chief upon the warpath against our enemies, and has given me skill to direct and you the courage to achieve a hundred victories over our enemies upon the warpath. All this occurred before we became a divided nation. We then had the courage and strength of the bear, but since the division our hearts and heels are like those of the rabbit and the fawn. We have neither courage nor confidence in our leaders or ourselves, and have fallen a prey to internal jealousies and petty strifes until we are no longer worthy of the illustrious name we bear. In a word, we have become subjects of ridicule and badinage, — "There goes a cowardly Sauk."

All this has resulted from the white man's accursed fire-water united with our own tribal quarrels and personal jealousies. The Great Spirit created this country for the use and benefit of his red children, and placed them in full possession of it, and we were happy and contented. Why did he send the palefaces across the great ocean to take it from us? When they landed on our territory they were received as long-absent brothers whom the Great Spirit had returned to us. Food and rest were freely given them by our fathers, who treated them all the more kindly on account of their weak and helpless condition. Had our fathers the desire, they could have crushed the intruders out of existence with the same ease we kill the blood-sucking mosquitoes. Little did our fathers then think they were taking to their bosoms, and warming them into life and vigor, a lot of torpid, half-frozen and starving vipers, which in a few winters would fix their deadly fangs upon the very bosoms that had nursed and cared for them when



they needed help. From the day when the palefaces landed upon our shores, they have been robbing us of our inheritance, and slowly, but surely, driving us back, back, back towards the setting sun, burning our villages, destroying our growing crops, ravishing our wives and daughters, beating our papposes with sticks, and brutally murdering our people upon the most flimsy pretenses and trivial causes.

Upon our return to Saukenuk from our winter hunting grounds last spring, we found the pale faces in our lodges, and they had torn down our fences and were plowing our corn lands and getting ready to plant their corn upon the lands which the Sacs have owned and cultivated for so many winters that our memory can not go back to them. Nor is this all. They claim to own our lands and lodges by right of purchase from the cowardly and treacherous Quashquamme, nearly thirty winters ago, and drive us away from our lodges and fields with kicks of their cruel boots, accompanied with vile cursing and beating with sticks. When returning from an ill-fated day's hunt, wearied and hungry, with my feet stumbling with the weight of sixty-four winters, I was basely charged by two palefaces of killing their hogs, which I indignantly denied, because the charge was false, but they told me I lied, and then they took my gun, powder-horn and bullet-pouch from me by violence, and beat me with a hickory stick until the blood ran down my back like drops of falling rain, and my body was so lame and sore for a moon that I could not hunt or fish. They brought their accursed fire-water to our village, making wolves of our braves and warriors, and then when we protested against the sale and destroyed their bad spirits, they came with a multitude on horseback, compelling us to flee across the Mississippi for our lives, and then they burned down our ancient village and turned their horses into our growing corn.



They are now running their plows through our graveyards, turning up the bones and ashes of our sacred dead, whose spirits are calling to us from the land of dreams for vengeance on the despoilers. Will the descendants of Nana-makee and our other illustrious dead stand idly by and suffer this sacrilege to be continued? Have they lost their strength and courage, and become squaws and papposes? The Great Spirit whispers in my ear, no! Then let us be again united as a nation and at once cross the Mississippi, rekindle our watch-fires upon our ancient watch-tower, and send forth the war whoop of the united Sacs, and our cousins, the Meskwakies, Pottawattamies, Ottawas, Chipeways, Winnebagoes and Kickapoos, will unite with us in avenging our wrongs upon the white pioneers of Illinois. When we recross the Mississippi with a strong army, the British Father will send us not only guns, tomahawks, spears, knives and ammunition in abundance, but he will also send us British soldiers to fight our battles for us. Then will the deadly arrow and fatal tomahawk hurtle through the air at the hearts and heads of the pale-faced invaders, sending their guilty spirits to the white man's place of endless punishment, and should we, while on the warpath, meet the Pauguk, our departing spirits will be led along that path which is strewn with beautiful flowers, laden with the fragrance of patriotism and heroism, which leads to the land of dreams, whence the spirits of our fathers are beckoning us on, to avenge their wrongs.

What a stirring appeal to the patriotism of the tribe! Playing upon the dominant emotions of the Indians, Black Hawk wrought them into a state of savage frenzy. Already under the influence of the war dance and too much whisky, men and women alike gave free expression to their enthusiasm for



war. Even Keokuk joined in the applause. Nah-pope made an impassioned speech in which he gave further assurance of military aid from neighboring tribes and predicted the formation of a great Indian confederation as numerous as the trees of the forest.

By this time the Indians were howling demons. There was no distinction between Black Hawk's band and their more peaceful hosts. Loudly Keokuk's headmen and warriors demanded that he lead them upon the warpath against the palefaces to avenge their wrongs. Nothing but a miracle could stem the tide of martial fervor.

It was a proud and happy moment for Black Hawk. The dreams of a lifetime were about to be realized. The success of his scheme to drive the white men out of the Great Valley seemed assured.

For Keokuk the occasion was fraught with equally potent consequences. Never had he been placed in such a critical and difficult position. Pledged to preserve peace with the settlers, he realized that his tribe was rushing pell-mell into war — into a hopeless struggle against insuperable odds. Open opposition to the prevailing opinion would mean loss of leadership, if not personal injury during the mad excitement of the moment. To temporize would seem like treason. It was no occasion for expedients or compromise. Whatever he did must be decisive, and done at once.

But Keokuk was not called the Watchful Fox



for nothing. He was intelligent, cunning, and masterful, with the courage of his convictions. When called upon to lead his braves to battle, Keokuk had decided upon his course of action. Without the slightest hesitation, he strode through the crowd of war-crazed savages and, walking directly to the war post, he placed his hand upon it. This was construed to mean that he was enlisting for the war and a great shout went up. The powerful Keokuk would have need of all his diplomacy and all his eloquence if he were to quell the lust for white men's blood. Perhaps only he and Black Hawk realized fully what was at stake. Calmly he waited for the tumult to subside. That was one of the most fateful and dramatic moments in the history of the tribe. Slowly Keokuk began:

Headmen, Chiefs, Braves, and Warriors of the Sacs, I have heard and considered your demand to be led forth upon the warpath against the palefaces to avenge the many wrongs, persecutions, outrages and murders committed by them upon our people. I deeply sympathise with you in your sense and construction of these terrible wrongs. Few, indeed, are our people who do not mourn the death of some near and loved one at the hands of the Long Guns, who are becoming very numerous. Their cabins are as plenty as the trees in the forest, and their soldiers are springing up like grass on the prairies. They have the talking thunder, which carries death a long way off, with long guns and short ones, long knives and short ones, ammunition and provisions in abundance, with powerful war horses for their soldiers to ride. In a contest where our numbers are so unequal to theirs we must ultimately



fail. All we can reasonably expect or hope is to wreak the utmost of our vengeance upon their hated heads, and fall, when fall we must, with our faces to the enemy. Great is the undertaking, and desperate must be our exertions. Every brave and warrior able to throw a tomahawk or wield a war-club must go with us. Once across the Mississippi, let no one think of returning while there is a foe to strike or a scalp to take, and when we fall — if our strength permit — let us drag our feeble, bleeding bodies to the graves of our ancestors, and there die, that our ashes may commingle with theirs, while our departing spirits shall follow the long trail made by them in their passage to the land of spirits.

It is my duty as your chief to be your father while in the paths of peace, and your leader and champion while on the warpath. You have decided to follow the path of war, and I will lead you forth to victory if the Good Spirit prevails. If not, and the Bad Spirit rules, then will I perish at my post of duty. But what shall we do with our old and infirm, our women and children? We can not take them with us upon the warpath, for they would hamper us in our movements and defeat us of our vengeance. We dare not leave them behind us, doomed to perish of hunger or fall captive to the palefaces, who would murder the old and the young, but reserve our wives and daughters for a fate worse than death itself.

I will lead you forth upon the warpath, but upon this condition: That we first put our wives and children, our aged and infirm, gently to sleep in that slumber which knows no waking this side the spirit land, and then carefully and tenderly lay their bodies away by the side of our sacred dead, from whence their freed spirits shall depart on the long journey to the happy homes in the land of dreams beneath, beyond the Evening Star. For we go upon the long trail which has no turn — from which,



in a few short moons, we shall follow them, but they must not follow us. This sacrifice is demanded of us by the very love we bear those dear ones. Our every feeling of humanity tells us we can not take them with us, and dare not leave them behind us.

Thus adroitly, while promising to accept the decision of the tribe, Keokuk compelled his people to think of the consequences. The half-drunken, blood-thirsty savages stood cowed before the terrible sacrifice that their chief required of them. Keokuk noticed the effect of his words and was quick to press his advantage over Black Hawk.

To you, venerable Chief, do I appeal for an answer to what I have said. Your long experience upon the warpath tells you I have spoken the truth; yet, with all your wonderful eloquence, you have urged us to this terrible sacrifice. Brooding over the oft-repeated wrongs committed by the palefaces upon you and your people, your mind has grown weak, until you have lent a willing ear to the whisperings of evil counsellors, who can not speak the truth because their tongues are forked, like the viper's.

They came to you under the guise and pretense of friendship, and by the use of base flattery and hypocrisy gained your confidence, only to lead you into the crooked path of ruin and destruction. They are enemies of yours and your band, instead of friends. They first told you the British Father has promised you aid and assistance, in warriors as well as guns, tomahawks, spears, knives, ammunition and provisions, as soon as you should recross the Mississippi at the head of a hostile army. Why has he not furnished you these things, to enable you to raise, arm and equip your army, ready for war? This fact proves the whole story a lie, prepared no doubt by Nahpope or



his cunning brother, Winneshiek, for the sole purpose of deceiving and misleading you and your band. The British Father is at peace with our Great Father at Washington, and neither knows of or cares for you or your grievances.

The same evil counsellors have told you that the moment you shall sound your war whoop east of the Mississippi all the Indian tribes between that and the Illinois River will rise up as a single warrior and unite with you under your banner to avenge their wrongs upon the white settlers. What wrongs have they to avenge? They are on terms of peace and good-will with these white settlers, and have no cause of complaint or grievance whatever. Yet they have told you that these Indians across the river were not only ready but eager to join you in a general massacre of the frontier inhabitants of northern Illinois, and are now only waiting your signal fires to be rekindled upon the watch-tower at Saukenuk to begin the slaughter. If this be true, why are not their war chiefs here tonight? Where are Waubonsie, Red Devil, Big Thunder Shaata, and Meachelle? Why are they not here in person, or by their representatives, if it be true they are anxious to go upon the warpath with you? Their absence is proof conclusive that they have no intention or desire to join you in this suicidal undertaking.

You have been deceived — aye, cruelly deceived — by these counsellors with a forked tongue, who are leading you into the crooked path of the Bad Spirit, and have no love for you or respect for your gray hairs or good name. I beseech you, by the noble character you have always borne, by the honors and trophies you have won upon the warpath, by the love you bear your gallant little band, by everything you hold sacred and dear, abandon this wild, visionary and desperate undertaking, and return to your village. Seed time is here, but your grounds have not been prepared for the planting. Go back and plant the sum-



mer's crop. Arise to the dignity and grandeur of your honored position as the father of your gallant little band; shake off the base fetters of the Bad Spirit which bind you hand and foot, and turn your feet from the crooked warpath into the path that leads to peace. In this way only can you save your true and trusty band from certain defeat, if not utter annihilation. If you still persist in going upon the warpath against the white people, then indeed may we bid farewell to Black Hawk, whose protecting spirit has forsaken him in his old age, and suffered his star of success — which has led him in triumph to a hundred victories on the warpath — to go down behind a cloud, never to rise again; and when the Pauguk comes, his lofty spirit will depart, groping its way doubtfully along the dark and crooked path to the land of dreams, unhonored, unlamented, and unwept.

A solemn stillness settled over the whole village. In contrast to the recent hubbub, the silence was foreboding, oppressive. The braves were sobered. Infuriated men were pacified. Indian mothers pressed their babes to their breasts and waited with throbbing hearts and fearful ears to hear their fate. But the ardor for war had suddenly cooled. Even Black Hawk was completely overwhelmed by the avalanche of eloquence which swept everything before it. His dream of vengeance was shattered; his vision of a great Indian confederacy appeared only as a preposterous nightmare. He was a vanquished leader on the eve of his greatest war.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS



## Indian Oratory

In the peaceful relations of the red men and the whites there was one faculty in which the Indian never failed to excite admiration. That was his manner of speech. Whether it be in the region of the Six Nations, in the land of the Seminoles, in the forests of Kentucky and Ohio, or on the prairies of Iowa, the richness of imaginative power, the simplicity of structure, and the nobility of content of Indian orations always left a lasting impression upon the white men who heard them. The names of Tecumseh, Cornstalk, and Logan attest to this fact in the Ohio country; while Keokuk, Poweshiek, and Black Hawk of Iowa are justly famous for their forensic ability. In other sections Osceola, Red Cloud, Chief Joseph, and Red Jacket have spoken words that have endured, a significant commentary on their power of expression.

On every frontier Indian oratory was dominated by one prevailing characteristic. In the speeches of Black Hawk and Poweshiek no less than in Logan's "Lament" there was the refrain of grievous wrongs long suffered and the pathos of a passing race. Here a word, there a gesture, all pointing to the realization of nothing left in life for the



individual or the group. The fire and audacity of bold words were always tempered by that melancholy tone of resignation to an unjust fate. In the famous speech of Logan there is a strain like something in the chorus of an old Greek tragedy.

I appeal to any white man to say, if ever he entered Logan's cabin hungry, and he gave him not meat; if ever he came cold and naked, and he clothed him not. During the course of the last long and bloody war Logan remained idle in his cabin, an advocate for peace. Such was my love for the whites, that my countrymen pointed as they passed and said, "Logan is the friend of white men." I had even thought to have lived with you, but for the injuries of one man. Colonel Cresap, the last spring, in cold blood, and unprovoked, murdered all the relations of Logan, not sparing even my women and children. There runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. I have sought it: I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance: for my country I rejoice at the beams of peace. But do not harbor a thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan? — Not one.

So spoke Logan, the Mingo chief, back in the Ohio country in 1774. "I may challenge the whole orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, and of any other eminent orator, if Europe has furnished more eminent, to produce a single passage, superior to the speech of Logan," wrote Thomas Jefferson. Now listen to Black Hawk addressing his band of Sacs in 1831, when they were ordered to leave Saukenuk and move west of the Mississippi.



Warriors, sixty summers or more have gone since our fathers sat down here and our mothers erected their lodges on this spot. On these pastures our horses have fattened; our wives and daughters have cultivated the cornfields and planted beans and melons and squashes; from these rivers our young men have obtained an abundance of fish. Here, too, you have been protected from your old enemy, the Sioux, by the mighty Mississippi. And here are the bones of our warriors and chiefs and orators.

But alas! what do I hear? The birds that have long gladdened these groves with their melody now sing a melancholy song! They say, "The red man must leave his home to make room for the white man."

I will not believe that the Great Chief, who is pleased to call himself our Father, will send his warriors against his children for no other cause than contending to cultivate their own fields and occupy their own houses. No! I will not believe it until I see his army. Not until then will I forsake the graves of my ancestors and the home of my youth.

Scarcely a year later, after his defeat at Bad Axe, Black Hawk, a prisoner of war, told of his motives in going on the warpath, of his hopes and disappointments, and of his final defeat. For simple, tragic beauty this speech is unexcelled.

My warriors fell around me. It began to look dismal. I saw my evil day at hand. The sun rose clear on us in the morning; at night it sank in a dark cloud and looked like a ball of fire. This was the last sun that shone on Black Hawk. He is now a prisoner of the white man, but he can stand the torture. He is not afraid of death. He is no coward — Black Hawk is an Indian.



The same plaintive, melancholy note pervades the brief speech of Poweshiek to the settlers of Johnson County on the Fourth of July, 1838. "Soon," he said, "I shall go to a new home and you will plant corn where my dead sleep. Our towns, the paths we have made, the flowers we love, will soon be yours. I have moved many times and have seen the white man put his feet in the tracks of the Indian and make the earth into fields and gardens."

Other Indian orators have been given high sanction by competent observers. Whatever their relative merit may be, the reported speeches of Black Hawk and Keokuk at the war council on the Iowa River when they were contesting for leadership of the tribe deserve a high place in Indian oratory. Black Hawk urging war; Keokuk urging peace. Keokuk came to be acknowledged as one of the greatest orators of his day, comparing favorably with John C. Calhoun and other prominent speakers in Congress and out. Certainly the orations of the modern and ancient world would need to be diligently thumbed to find a more powerful appeal or technique more adroit. That it effected its purpose is evident. Black Hawk's dreams were shattered. If the supreme test of oratory is the achievement of a purpose, then Keokuk's speech to the Sac warriors on the eve of the Black Hawk War may be classed as a masterpiece.

Besides this quality of sadness for the loss of



the homes of their fathers, there runs through Indian oratory a universal trait of drawing upon the physical world around them for figures of speech. "A language," says Francis Parkman, "extremely deficient in words of general and abstract signification renders the use of figures indispensable, and it is from this cause above all others that the flowers of Indian rhetoric derive their origin."

Nature was close to the red man. His whole experience was intimately associated with the prairies and forests, the changing seasons, storm and sunshine. It is not strange, therefore, that he should speak in terms of the natural phenomena about him. Almost every speech is replete with metaphorical allusion. "Their cabins are as plenty as the trees in the forest, and their soldiers are springing up like grass on the prairies," said Keokuk at the war council on the Iowa in 1832, speaking of the strength of the white men. "They have the talking thunder, which carries death a long way off, with long guns and short ones, long knives and short ones, ammunition and provisions in abundance, with powerful war horses for their soldiers to ride."

In all the transcripts of Indian speeches, suffering undoubtedly from misinterpretation and misunderstanding, this custom of depending upon the rich storehouse of nature for figures of speech is prevalent. The meaning is never ambiguous, yet every idea is richly adorned with simile and meta-

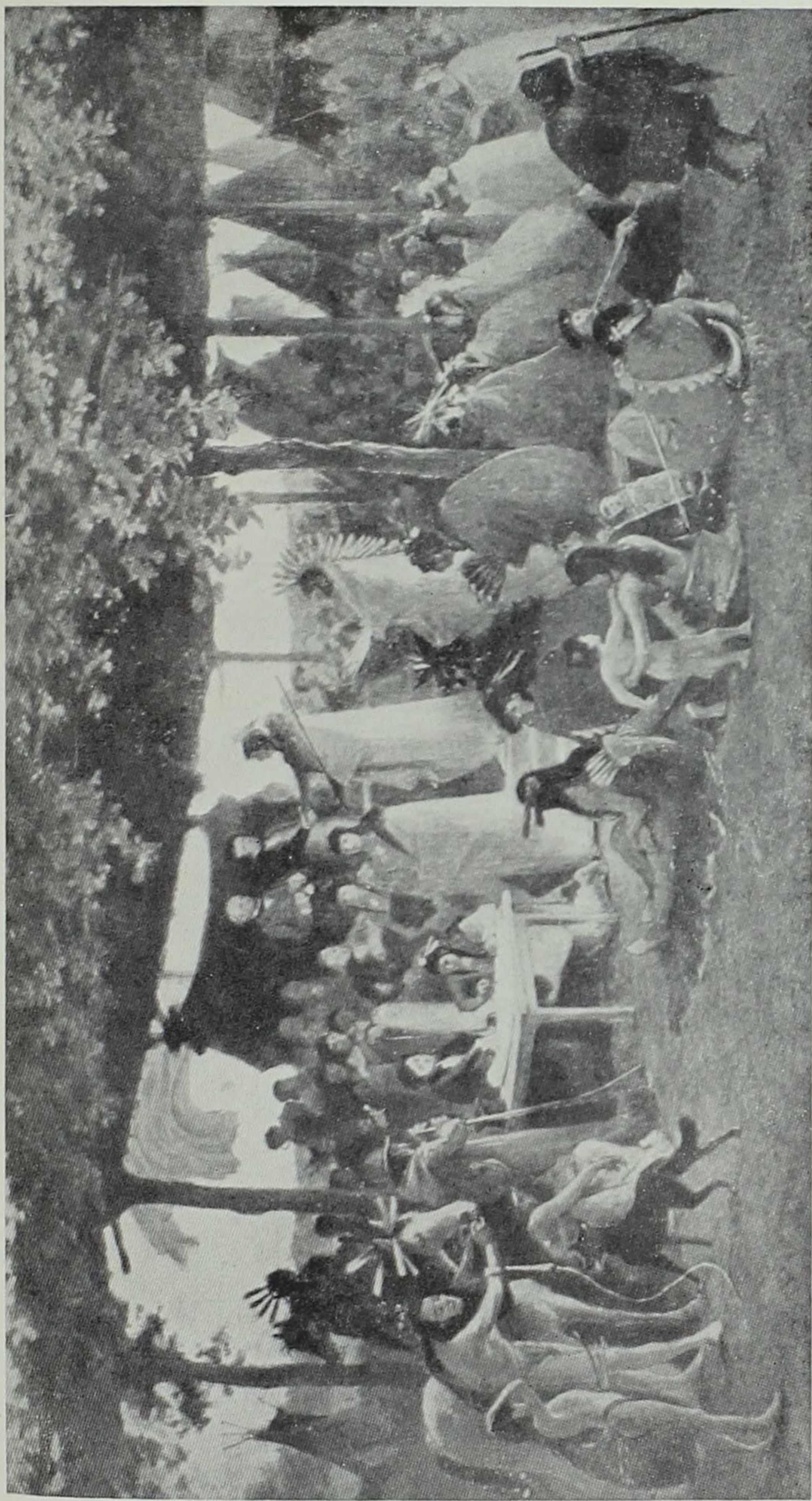


phor, imparting a beauty to Indian eloquence that is singularly appropriate.

Lew Sarett, who has associated intimately with the modern, semi-civilized Indian, remarks this tendency even to-day. "His pantheistic conception of nature," he says, "is sublime in its personification of the wilderness, in its humanization of earth and sky and water, of beast and bird and reptile, of the flash of the lightning, the rumble of thunder, and the roar of the big winds. In the supernatural world created by his imagination there is a weird mysticism; for the Indian walks through life ever beckoned by unseen hands, ever communing with the ghosts of the unseen spirit of beast and devil and god." What wonder that some of their mystic love of nature is reflected in their speech.

F. R. AUMANN





Painting by Frank B. Mayer in Folwell's *A History of Minnesota*.

#### Treaty of Traverse des Sioux

The gathering of large numbers of Indians, whether for peace or war, was always a colorful spectacle. By the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in Minnesota the red man surrendered his last claim to land in Iowa in 1851.





Painting by J. O. Lewis

### Grand Council of 1825 at Prairie du Chien

By this treaty there was established the Neutral Line between the Sioux on the north and the Sauk and Fox on the South.